




La revue *Aleph. langues, médias et sociétés* est approuvée par ERIHPLUS. Elle est classée à la catégorie B.

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Favoriser la Compétence de la Lecture par l'Enseignement des Textes de Civilisation et Littérature

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	Submission	Publication numérique	Publication Asjp
	27 - 09 - 2021	14-05-2023	25-10-2023

**Éditeur :** Edile (Edition et diffusion de l'écrit scientifique)

**Dépôt légal :** 6109-2014

**Edition numérique :** <https://aleph.edinum.org>

**Date de publication :** 14 mai 2022

**ISSN :** 2437-1076

**(Edition ASJP) :** <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/226>

**Date de publication :** 25 octobre 2023

Pagination : 69-81

**ISSN :** 2437-0274

**Référence papier**

Nadia Louahala et Nadia Amraen, « Fostering the Reading Skill through Teaching Texts of Civilization and Literature », *Aleph*, Vol 10 (4-2) | 2023, p. 69-81.

**Référence électronique**

Nadia Louahala et Nadia Amrane, « Fostering the Reading Skill through Teaching Texts of Civilization and Literature », *Aleph* [En ligne], 2023 mis en ligne le 14 /05/ 2022. URL : <https://aleph.edinum.org/9251>



# Fostering the Reading Skill through Teaching Texts of Civilization and Literature

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## Favoriser la Compétence de la Lecture par l'Enseignement des Textes de Civilisation et Littérature

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### Introduction

The reading skill is primordial for the learning of any language and for any academic achievement, intellectual development or professional advancement. In this line, the authenticity of materials and the way of teaching is significant and a challenge regarding the reading skill. The lack of motivation and reading difficulties of learners may lead to a failure of reaching the goals. It is important to design worth and fruitful reading texts with self-enjoyment such literary and civilization texts that are used for centuries since the Greek Latin civilisation and literature. Nowadays, with digital reading the accessibility of such kind of texts is everywhere in series and on internet. For Lazar (1993), literary texts highlight those widespread topics which are applicable to students' self-development, involvement and autonomy. The reading skill is a matter that has been intensively explored and studied yet it stills a present attention of researchers due to the challenges of both learning and teaching a foreign language and its difficulty. For Alderson J. C (2000 :28), a person may read for enjoyment to enhance knowledge of the language being read as he stated it:

... Enjoyable, intense, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived and in which one can become to hilly observed. Reading means different things to different people, for some it is recognizing written words, while for others it is an opportunity to teach pronunciation and practice speaking. However, always reading has a purpose. It is something that we do every day. It is an essential part of our daily lives, taken very much granted and generally assumed to do something that everyone can do.

Nuttal (1982 :168) adds that : “the best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it”. Reading texts also provides readers the possibilities to learn words, grammar, and punctuation as well forms, structures or the

way sentences, paragraphs and texts are constructed. However, EFL teachers know that for many language students, the ability to engage in fluent reading and to read both for important information and for pleasure is the most valuable benefit they will gain from language study. Henceforth, they have a key role to play in helping learners with low reading abilities by motivating them to read more and more different texts in order to enhance in them a reading habit and to give them a thirst for reading that will surely stay with them throughout their lives (Louahala N, 2017 :28). However, this exploration emphasizes the effect of texts of literature and civilization on fostering learners' reading skill among undergraduate students of University Djilali Liabes of Sidi Bel Abbes.

## **1. Texts of Civilization and Literature**

Numerous investigators have acknowledged the role of reading being a significant skill in the psychological development of an individual, then again simply if reading is meant at consciousness and comprehension of what he read (Muštafa Kulovich, 2019). Actually, we have to make learners love reading and not only to read but to be inspired, to think and to enjoy. The theme of the text is a key element of reading. Generally, texts related to civilization and literatures are highly appreciated by learners because they grasp their attention and curiosity to discover life experiences and what happened in the history. In fact, past gave important lessons of life to people and this is the point in addition to the enrichment of the used language.

Texts of civilization and literature are powerful for attracting learners to read more by the use of factual life experiences and lead to debates in reading comprehension. Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2011) declare that literary writings are great experience to readers and this back to learning through reading comprehension. From this debate, it is agreed that literary texts are crucial as pedagogical resources for learners.

Many researchers as Maley (2001), McRae (1997), Lazar (1993), Collie and Slater (1994) agree that the choice of the picked text is a central element in preparing a material for teaching a language. Furthermore, Collie and Slater (1994) give an emphasis that the text choice procedure should take into consideration many conditions as group work of students, needs, interests, cultural background and language level.

The application of literary texts as reliable learning resources in the EFL classroom not just make learners to debate with peers and teachers but it make them profoundly practice skills as reading, writing, listening or speaking. Such

texts are very original and beautiful that evokes critical thinking by using a specific language mirroring real life talks and situations in imaginative or non-imaginative manner (Savidou, 2004). Moreover, Dasklovska and Dimova (2012) state that several implications of literary texts successively portray supplies that permit learners to explore deeply connotative senses of various cultures. Then, it endorses critical thinking about everyday issues. After that, such kind of texts is authentic, motivating and inspiring for students. Therefore, it emboldens energetic learner engagement and interaction in classroom. Further, it stimulates learners to intensively read more. Lazar (1993) inspects alike causes for the use of literature in EFL classrooms, and complements that literary text practise supports the improvement of students' interpretive aptitudes in asking questions, settling hypothesis and relating ideas related to the text meanings.

Learners pick up their own texts according to their taste and interest (Eskey & Grabe, 1988). Somewhat clearly, being connected to texts of civilization and literature reflect on the manner in which writers and readers are connected (Hoey, 2001, p. 1; see also Widdowson, 1979). Reading is an exercise of any language exposure.

Civilization and literature are language means that may be used in the classroom. Akyel & Yalçın (1990) indicates reasons of such implementation as to widen learner's perspectives through the knowledge inside masterpieces of literature and civilization. Indeed, Povey (1972) expressed that literature will rise language skills since literature will spread understanding. Text can be read through teacher then learners. Furthermore, McKay (1996) express that the choice of the text is an important stage then how to apply texts according to students' need, cultural context and their level.

Brock (1990), while picking up a text we should take into consideration the following elements mainly the principles, topic and concerns depicted from literary texts which can meaningfully influence reading understanding and adoration of literature

## **2. Research Methodology**

This current research emphasises fostering reading skills through civilisation and literature texts through the use of a survey that was addressed to (40) undergraduate students at University Djilali Liabes in May 2022. Overall, 14 items were used in a questionnaire about different aspects of reading attitude, experience and opinions regarding the use of texts of civilization and literature. In this perspective, the data were gathered and analysed in order to examine the hypothesis. Moreover, a structured interview

were also used whereby (02) teachers respectively one of literature and one of civilization from University Djilali Liabes participated in order to clarify more the efficiency of using literary and historical texts in EFL teaching process so that to promote learners' reading skills.

### **3. Results and discussion**

#### **3.1. Survey of students**

##### **Do you appreciate English courses or not?**

This question tackles learners' opinion about English courses. It has been designed in order to know either they are strongly interested to learn English language or not. However, the results showed that the majority (85%) of participants mentioned that EFL courses are tremendously important, while a minority of them (15%) stated that courses are not so interesting because most of the time they face difficulties in learning English as a language. In addition, they confirmed that they like English language but English as a branch of study it was not a personal choice for them.

##### **How would you assess your level in English language?**

More than a half of participants (65%) claim that they are neither good nor weak. A minority of them (15%) confirmed that they have a weak level in English, while the rest representing (10%) mentioned that they had excellent levels. In fact, in order to have a good level in English learner should be autonomous and teaching should be too shifted to learner centeredness than teacher centeredness. Indeed, the exposure and the practice of language enhance learners' English proficiency.

##### **Do you enjoy the reading skills in English course?**

All participants (100%) mentioned that they opt for reading skill not only because it is important for the acquisition of a new vocabulary or new words but it also helps them to know about different cultures, styles, forms, writers... The debate that comes after reading is very interesting and creates a sort of interaction between teachers, peers and students.

##### **What is your motive from reading?**

The main purpose of this question is to know about the learners' attitude toward reading. According to the obtained results, among half of the participants (50%) confirmed that their motive to read is principally to get information, while a minority (10%) asserted that they have to read for pleasure. The others representing (40%) of the participants answered that they read in order to improve their general knowledge.

**What do you often do in your free times?**

Most of the participants asserted that they deal more with written texts in their studies and even in their daily life, yet they speak and write less. However, the listening skill ranks just after reading skill. They confirmed that English language students give too much priority to receptive skills notably listening and reading rather than the productive skills mainly the speaking and writing ones. They added that if the receptive skills are not taught appropriately using methods and strategies that enhance the productive skills; they will surely become passive learners. They also confirmed that because social media is posting every minute and digital reading is everywhere; so that they spend a long time reading through internet. Almost they Listen to English songs, conversations, communicate in English with others or read books, articles, stories, novels ... etc

**Do you think that reading literary genres and historical textbooks is beneficial for an EFL learner to develop his/her language abilities?**

The majority of the respondents believe that reading literacy and historical textbooks helps them to improve their linguistic abilities and think that these kinds of textbooks can enhance their motivation, while some of them assume that it helps them grasp the dimensions of the English language. However, students show a great awareness of the role of literature and civilisation in promoting their learning abilities. Reading different genre of texts does not serve only linguistic purposes, but also aesthetic and cultural ones. Such kind of reading enlarges the vocabulary, improve words spellings and evoke the sense of writing and critical thinking.

**What skills do you think have to be reinforced to help you better assimilate literary texts?**

The obtained results denote that the majority of participants (80%) have confirmed that reading books or texts in literature and civilization can help them develop other skills mainly the writing one. For them, reading helps them improve their learning abilities through the acquisition of new words, expressions, ideas and language structure. Overall, it is the reading skill that enlarges the assimilation of literary texts. This fact confirms that students are so aware of the strong relation that exists between reading and literature or civilization. They also added that they have been taught that reading is the mainstay of literature and civilization and both of them are reading-centred tasks. Thus, the reading skill should be highly promoted and appropriately incorporated in the courses of literature and civilisation.

**When your teachers assign texts (either in literature or civilization) to be read and prepared; Do you really understand them?**

The majority of participants mentioned that they hardly understand the texts assigned by teachers. This depends mainly on the choice of texts because teachers have most of the time the tendency to select difficult texts including harsh literary and linguistic components. They also confirmed that the success or failure of reading is greatly dependent on the choice of texts. Thus, the teachers need to take into consideration the principles of selecting a reading passage. They have also to involve students in texts' selection through arranging open sessions and meetings whereby students can discuss and exchange ideas and experiences about the most interesting literary and cultural works. Such meetings with teachers can serve as a strong platform for increasing motivation and interest in reading particular works.

**What kind of difficulties do you encounter when reading texts in literature and civilization?**

The majority of participants (70%) stated that they have difficulties with vocabulary and new words, which proves that they are stuck to word by word reading techniques and apply factual reading strategies to literary, cultural and historical materials, the fact which will lead directly to failures and frustrations. This also means that they do not read for meaning to understand the whole contexts, but instead they rely on translation and word by word reading. They even do not know English grammatical rules and structures.

**Have you ever used any of the following techniques when reading: Survey-recite-review?**

The majority mentioned that survey, recite and review are the most essential techniques in the widely used strategies and intensive reading, but in practice they never used them. This proves that the majority of EFL learners are not strategic readers and do not know how to read intensively.

**Do you know what is meant by skimming-scanning-intensive and extensive reading?**

It is noticed that the great number of respondents (80%) already know what is skimming and scanning yet they do not know the other types of reading which are intensive reading and extensive reading.

**When you confront difficulties in reading words do you: check your dictionary-translate into French and Arabic language or simply try to guess the meaning?**



A great number of the respondents stated that they rely on dictionaries to check the real meaning of words typically the English-Arabic dictionary and the English French dictionary while they rarely rely on the English-English dictionary.

As far as theory is concerned, the over use of dictionaries in reading English texts will destroy the pleasure of reading and certain cognitive skills such as guessing and interpreting. However, students have the tendency to focus on the language itself and not on the messages every text is trying to transmit. That is why teachers need to urge their students to rely on contexts and not on using dictionaries except for the explanation of difficult keywords that will distort students understanding or texts.

### **Do you read texts in languages other than English?**

The results reveal that the overwhelming (70%) of respondents have attempted to read literary and historical texts in classical Arabic and a minority (80%) have confirmed to have read whole texts in Arabic. For them doing the reading in Arabic will provide them with abilities and dispositions for reading any genre of texts in foreign languages.

### **Do your teachers motivate you to read at home?**

Most of the participants (95%) stated that teachers always encourage them to read at home, while a minority (5%) of them answered “no”. The majority, however, added that teachers most of the time help them in selecting their readings.

## **3.2. Interview of Teachers**

### **How long have you been teaching civilization or literature?**

The totality of teachers interviewed has an experience of teaching that overcome five years. They have a great experience regarding the materials used to teach English language. Through time they gain more confidence of application of authentic materials regarding literature and civilisation.

### **Do you use texts in teaching civilization and literature?**

The findings reveal that it's very common to use literary texts in teaching literature. Yet, an intensive reading is not generally the case. Otherwise, in civilization the use of texts is not frequent in teaching civilization. In fact, it is used occasionally for this respect. Teachers of history generally organize their classroom activities around central themes or concepts known as thematic units, whereby teachers move away from core text dependent instruction in order to allow learners the possibility to explore a wide range of material in

pursuit of answers to questions that integrate them about a specific topic. However, students are required to make research and discover information on their own or in groups. They are also provided by background information in order to spark their interests.

### **How do you find learners reaction and feedback toward the use of texts of civilization and literature?**

Generally, it seems interesting because after reading it opens the doors toward debates and critical thinking. The texts and extracts used in both literature and civilization are central toward historical aspects and shed a light toward real life issues. Hence, students “curiosity pushes them to be involved. Here, the theme and topic as well as the choice of text are very important according to their level. However, when the text is highly difficult regarding its vocabulary or the topic seems not interesting the text of literature and civilization may not attract learners. While if it is interesting, it may push learners toward independent and complementary reading outside the class.

### **Do you face any difficulties when integrating such texts?**

While the integration of texts of literature and civilization in the class almost the time is not enough. A complementary sessions may be better or opening the door toward compliment or independent reading of students outside class. Also, some literary texts and civilization writings are with hard vocabulary that overcomes the level of students. Somehow, in some cases the topic may seem not interesting to students, thus the teacher should take into consideration these hindrances and adapt a course design accordingly.

All in all, the use of literary, historical and cultural texts in EFL classrooms helps directly to promote learners’ language proficiency. There will be surely a development of learners’ vocabulary knowledge as Coady (1993 :18) confirmed it: “there is a gradual but steady incremental growth of vocabulary knowledge through meaningful interaction with texts.” In addition, providing learners with authentic texts to be read such as poems, books, short stories, tales, historical episodes ... etc and asking them to summarize and make their oral reports will indirectly result in the promotion of learners abilities in other skills notably: speaking, listening and writing.

The use of texts from any chronological historical narrative is strongly advocated to provide learners with a framework within which to place the questions, topics, historical episodes and personalities that teachers choose to stress. They in fact serve as a detailed timeline for historical facts so that to avoid disorientation and loss of continuity. Teaching activities that are more

problematic and analytical such as historical analysis exercises, simulations (role playing), reading primary resource documents, watching films, staging plays, preparing reports and essays ... are also recommended for a better enhancement of learners' understandings (Louahala N. 2017 :8).

It is also worth mentioning that reading different genres of texts or making learners read in quantity will enhance their reading habit and make teachers form proficient lifelong readers. Hence, reading can be considered as the key to develop learners culturally, socially and emotionally. However, learners should be taught to read for the meaning in order to grasp qualities of well qualified readers. In this context, Geoff (2004, 1979 :81) mentioned seven qualities of good readers, who make a good interaction with texts and who should know the following key points:

- Reading improves through self monitoring of and reflection on, own abilities and progress.
- Reading is a complex, intellectual endeavour requiring a reader to draw on a range of meaning-making skills. This means that before worthwhile reading engagement can begin; readers have to be aware that some sort of meaning will be sought.
- Readers should know why texts might not satisfy their original requirement or why texts have been rejected. Indeed, knowing why texts have been chosen and practising the making of effective choices, is a vital reading skill. However, some texts do not fulfil their initial promise.
- Readers should know how to interact appropriately with a variety of text types and genres. Readers should know how to be critically active before encountering the substantial body of any text. Good readers are already asking questions of the text before engaging with the main content.
- Readers should know how to deploy previous knowledge of other texts to enable the effective meaning making of the most recent textual encounter.
- Readers should know how to predict the way the text is likely to work, or be constructed and can use that knowledge to confirm or re-adjust those predictions depending on how typically the texts proceeds.

## Conclusion

Teaching reading and how to make students read more still among difficulties of language teaching and learning. Hence, reading may be also a self-enjoyment and source of entertainment also nurture of mind. Literature and civilization texts are stimulators and inspiration than ordinary texts; while they can be applied in developing reading skills of our learners. Furthermore, they are mirror to societies and an exposure to language. Tell what you read will tell you what you think because it shapes minds and personalities.

Reading skills have been always a hard task and among difficulties in learning and teaching. The adequate way to improve reading skills as being fruitful and skilful for learning any language is a big question. Further, how to motivate students to read is also among issues faced by teachers. In fact, it is what we read that shape how we think. During the selection of texts of literature and civilization we should take into consideration the cultural, social and religious backgrounds of learners. Also we should pick up texts according to their level of language. The time devoted in the classroom regarding reading texts of literature and civilization may not be enough. Supplement time of reading outside classroom may be necessary. Reading comprehension activities may be added to assess learners' understanding of reading.

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## Abstract

The reading skill helps learners to learn any language, for personal improvement and intellectual growth. The efficacy and authenticity of the used texts according to learners’ level is a challenge for EFL teachers. Texts of literature and civilisation have been pointed to be very useful by rising reading motivation and self-enjoyment. For this matter, this research aims at examining whether literature and civilization texts can foster the learners’ reading abilities or not. This study comprises two research tools namely a survey addressed randomly to forty undergraduate students at University

Djilali Liabes of Sidi Bel Abbes and an interview with two teachers of literature and civilization in order to investigate and reflect upon the impact of literature and civilization teachings on the reading skill, the response of the students towards literary and historical texts as well as the strategies that teachers should use in the classrooms for the promotion of the learning process. The findings reveal that literature and civilisation texts seem more fruitful than ordinary texts in order to foster the reading skill and students' abilities in English, because of they are a source of attraction or motivation and being highly rich in language. The selection of the text and its theme are a very important step in EFL classrooms that may open the door to independent reading of learners too.

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### **Keywords**

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Texts, civilization, literature, reading, learning

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### **Résumé**

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La compétence en lecture aide les apprenants à apprendre n'importe quelle langue pour une amélioration personnelle et intellectuelle. L'efficacité et l'authenticité des textes utilisées selon le niveau des apprenants est un défi pour les enseignants de la langue anglaise comme langue étrangère. Les textes de littérature et de civilisation se sont révélés très utiles afin de favoriser la motivation de lire et le plaisir de soi. A cet égard, cette recherche vise à examiner si les textes de littérature et de civilisation favorisent ou pas les capacités de lecture des apprenants. Cette étude comprend deux outils de recherche notamment un questionnaire adressé au hasard à 40 étudiants qui préparent une licence à l'Université Djilali Liabes de Sidi Bel Abbes et un entretien avec deux enseignants de la littérature et de civilisation afin d'enquêter sur l'impact des enseignements de littérature et de civilisation sur la compétence en lecture, la réponse des étudiants envers les textes littéraires et historiques ainsi que les stratégies que les enseignants devraient utiliser dans leurs classes afin de développer le processus d'apprentissage. Les résultats révèlent que les textes de littérature et de civilisation semblent plus importants que les textes ordinaires pour favoriser la capacité de lire et les capacités des apprenants en Anglais car ils représentent une source d'attraction ou de motivation et ils sont très riches en langage. Le choix du texte et de son thème est une étape très importante dans les classes de la langue anglaise comme langue étrangère qui peut ouvrir la porte à une lecture indépendante des apprenants.

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### **Mots clés**

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Textes, civilisation, littérature, lecture, apprentissage.

## ملخص

تساعد مهارات القراءة المتعلمة في تعلم أي لغة، وتحسين شخصياتهم ونموهم الفكري. تمثل فعالية ونوعية النصوص المستخدمة تحديًا للمعلم خاصة من ناحية مستوى المتعلم. تمت الإشارة إلى أن نصوص الأدب والحضارة تكون مفيدة للغاية من خلال زيادة الدافعية للقراءة والتمتع بالذات، لهذا الغرض يهدف هذا البحث إلى فحص ما إذا كانت النصوص الأدبية والحضارية يمكن أن تعزز قدرات القراءة أم لا. تمت هذه الدراسة باستعمال أداتين بحثيتين هما استطلاع موجه عشوائيًا لأربعين طالبًا جامعيًا من جامعة الجيلالي اليابس بسبيدي بلعباس وايضا مقابلة مع اثنين من مدرسي الادب والحضارة الانجليزية بصدد دراسة استجابة الطلاب للأدب ونصوص الحضارة والقراءة. كذلك تمت دراسة الاستراتيجيات التي يجب على المعلمين استخدامها في الفصول الدراسية لتعزيز عملية التعلم من خلال النصوص من أجل تطوير مهارات القراءة أو بالنسبة للطلاب لأنها مصدر جذب أو تحفيز وكونها غنية للغاية باللغة. يعد اختيار النص وموضوعه خطوة مهمة للغاية في فصل اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية التي قد تفتح المجال أمام القراءة المستقلة للمتعلمين أيضًا.

## كلمات مفتاحية

نصوص، حضارة، أدب، قراءة، تعلم